

# Brother Ketcherside's New Fallacy

By J. D. Thomas

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Oftentimes when people are converted away from one extreme view they go to the opposite extreme. It is rather common knowledge among us that Carl Ketcherside was once the champion of a very legalistic attitude among us and also that he has changed from that extreme position to another, which he acknowledges to be regarded by many as unduly liberal. (This does not mean liberal in the sense of modernism, but it does mean unduly liberal in the sense of sanctioning denominational doctrines and practices.)

Brother Ketcherside's new emphasis on the "fellowship of the concerned ones" is a bid for unity of all immersed believers in full fellowship, without regard for doctrinal differences, even if the doctrines actually are considered to lead to sin on the part of some. In other words, we should fellowship the instrumental music brethren and associate with them openly and freely, and if we try to teach them it should be in a way that would not interfere with full fellowship.

I do not know Brother Ketcherside personally and have never seen him, so far as I am aware; but by reputation he is a very capable and influential person and is exercising considerable influence today through his personal appearances and his little paper, THE MISSION MESSENGER. Requests have come in that I give some attention to his arguments, and the present writing is limited in content to matters in his editorial "FELLOWSHIP" in the August, 1962, issue of his paper. This article does seem to be quite comprehensive in scope and to give a rather basic outline of his present appeal. What is said here in my writings about him and his views will not be taken as personal, I am sure, and is intended only as a fair review of his present emphasis which I believe to be unquestionably wrong. I appreciate, of course, his spirit of magnanimity and his wanting to "brother" everybody that he can, but I think that he, in his enthusiasm for brotherhood unity and his disparagement of differences among us does actually go contrary to some Biblical principles; and if this is true, brethren should be aware of these points before they get swept away by a "zeal without knowledge."

Brother Ketcherside has a very analytical mind, and he does a very fine job of describing the differences among us and the points over which we have disagreement, observing that we run the whole gamut between the extremes of "hobbyism to sectarianism." He deplors this condition and thinks that all of us ought to ignore all doctrinal differences

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and have full fellowship with each other, even though different groups of us practice things that others count as being definitely sinful. Since the instrumental music question is that which divides the greater majority of immersed believers, Brother Ketcherside is especially vocal about this problem, and he goes so far as to imply that in order to have a spirit of brotherly love and to avoid "setting at nought a brother," we simply ought to quit thinking of instrumental music as sinful" (my emphasis—JDT) and should be willing to let our brethren practice what they please in this respect without any "repudiation by disfellowship." He observes that "the New Covenant scriptures do not specifically brand the use of instrumental music as a sin"; and although he himself believes instrumental music is wrong and does not himself sing where it is used, he is by this actually implying that the New Testament teaching is not clear-cut in the matter, and that brethren are justified in their confusion on the point. This argument is, of course, fallacious because there are many things that "the New Covenant does not brand specifically as a sin." The gist of his argument is that we really cannot know what is sinful and what is not, and he thus reduces all faith to being simply "opinion." The implication is that everything that brethren disagree about, regardless as to how sinful these points may be, should simply be ignored for the sake of the fellowship, and the specific implication is that we who count instrumental music as definitely sinful should quit thinking of it as being that way and should honor and respect all immersed believers as our brothers; as in full fellowship with us; and without making any fellowship issue of any of these matters. He deplores the splintered condition of the brotherhood (as we all do) but he implies that we cannot know the truth anyway! He also argues that it is a fallacious and unworkable system to try to "maintain doctrinal purity by division." This we will examine later.

Ketcherside apparently fails to see where his basic argument really leads. Actually, *denominational* people consider baptism by immersion to be only a matter of "opinion," and if Brother Ketcherside's principle be allowed to go to its full demand, then he would have to fellowship all denominational people, even though they have not been baptized. As a matter of fact, he says, "to those who put Christ first and exalt him above all else, a sense of brotherhood is greater than any view about music or cups . . . . So long as Jesus is our only creed, this will be true. When we allow other things to become a creed, we will dissolve over differences." This lets in denominational people to full Christian fellowship (as far as I can see it) since they insist that "Jesus is their only creed," and they do not want to "allow baptism to become a creed." It seems that Ketcherside is hard put here to leave the unimmersed out in his unity program.

### **WHERE DRAW THE LINE?**

J. W. McGarvey, in his book of sermons, has a sermon entitled "Believing a Lie," in which he sets forth the principle that would get Brother Ketcherside back on the right track. This principle in substance says that brethren can differ with each other and have opinions freely without danger to fellowship as long as believing the lie does not lead to committing sin. Any lie or wrong doctrine believed in, as long as it does not cause one to sin, may be comparatively harmless; but to believe a lie that will lead one to commit a sin is, of course, to believe that which will bring spiritual death, and it is obviously dangerous and cannot be tolerated

by the man who wants to please God. Romans 14:23 says, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." If I believe instrumental music in worship to be a sin, I cannot practice it, neither can I honor anyone else that does it. John (2 John 9-11) warns me that if I "bid godspeed" or give my blessing in a definite way to the preaching or teaching of a false doctrine, then I become guilty of such teaching myself.

One of Brother Ketcherside's basic fal-

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lacies in this whole matter, I think, is his argument that he is reported to make that: "Full fellowship does not mean endorsement." With such a view I cannot agree. For me to worship with instrumental music brethren where the instrument is public and prominent (if I did it with any degree of regularity) would be considered as sanction and endorsement. We are to "shun all appearance of evil," and there are many ways in which a person can lend sanction and endorsement to a doctrine even though he might deny it with words. We all know that "sermons seen" preach louder than "sermons heard," and it is naive to think that "buddying-up" with somebody does not generally classify you with him. Things that are less public, of course, do not carry such influence. We cannot afford to bid godspeed to any sinful teachings that are publicly and prominently known because in doing so we partake of the evil of such doctrines. The consequences of what I am saying here is, of course, that we will always have differing groups, about things which different people count as sinful. But there is no other way out. For me to sanction by association a teaching that is sinful or even that I believe to be sinful is to become sinful myself.

This still does not mean that we cannot love all of our brethren or even the denominational people who "believe in Christ," yet who have not obeyed the gospel. We can love all of them, and we can be friendly and associate with them, and we can have meetings with them if the opportunity presents itself in the hope of working out our differences; but to merely ignore differences or to say that no issues should be counted as clearly sinful and wrong to the point of requiring disfellowship, and that we can sanction all of these matters by association is to ignore Biblical teaching. The Bible says for us to withdraw ourselves "from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us" (2 Thess. 3:6). "Doctrinal purity by division" must be maintained if we do not wish to bid godspeed to false teaching. Since we cannot agree on every teaching, however, and *must* fellowship people who differ with us on some points—the place to draw the line is where the teaching clearly leads to disobedience to God. If we disagree on what constitutes disobedience to God, we just have to disagree; but if the point of disagreement leads to a clear-cut sin (in our view), we would become sinners ourselves if we sanctioned it by association. Fellowship does constitute endorsement—of major well-known matters and practices!

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